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James Earl Ray Weds

Petros, Tenn.

A trembling James Earl Ray married a nervous Anna Sandhu yesterday behind prison walls where he is serving a 99-year sentence for the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Ray, a 50-year-old bachelor and his bride, a 31-year-old divorcee and freelance courtroom artist, were married during a brief ceremony by the Rev. James Lawson. Lawson is a former King associate who invited the civil rights leader to Memphis, where he was slain ten years ago.

Reporters and photographers were barred from the 30-minute ceremony, attended by only a few friends and relatives. But Lawson played a tape of the proceedings at Brushy Mountain State Prison.

"This signifies that the best of your lives is yet to be, the past is

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UPI Telephoto

Anna Sandhu Ray showed off her wedding ring after the ceremony conducted by the Rev. James Lawson

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behind you," Lawson told the couple. "The reason I am here is because I see it as a sign of grace."

"I know we have a lot of adversity ahead of us," she said, occasionally wiping tears from her eyes. "But we're ready to face it."

Smiling nervously, the bride, wearing an off-white pleated skirt and matching crocheted blouse, told reporters after the ceremony that it was the happiest day of her life.

The couple had a short reception with a cake baked by Ray's cellmate. They spent ten minutes separated from their guests, but were watched closely by four guards. Tennessee law does not permit conjugal visits.

The new Mrs. Ray left for her Knoxville home after the wedding. Ray was returned to his cell.

Ray's attorney Mark Lane, one of only five invited guests, said he has uncovered evidence "we believe conclusively shows the group responsible for Dr. King's murder." He said it will be presented to a court within the next two weeks. He did not elaborate.

The bride, who met Ray in October, 1977, while he was on trial for his escape from prison that June, was divorced five years ago after a three-year marriage.

"When we first met, I guess I mainly felt sympathetic about his situation," she said. "But those situations have changed to love and concern."

She said she began visiting Ray twice a week, the maximum allowed by the prison. When Ray testified before the House Assassinations Committee in Washington last August, he wore a shirt and sport coat given to him by the artist.

Mrs. Ray said Ray never formally proposed and that their plans for marriage evolved as "a mutual understanding of our feelings."

Ray pleaded guilty in 1969 to murdering the civil rights leader but tried to recant three days later. He has been trying to win a new trial ever since.

"They've got James behind bars as a scapegoat," his bride said.

"He's a lovable man. I know he's not capable of murder."